

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:
(#14) God Justifying the Believing Sinner**

Let us begin today with the reading of a familiar passage in which the apostle Paul sets forth the order of salvation—Romans 8:28-30.

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, *these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

Today we continue our study on what the Bible teaches regarding the conversion of a sinner to become a Christian. Conversion is essential to salvation. Our Lord taught His disciples this truth in very clear terms. We read in Matthew 18:1ff these words,

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, *unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt. 18:1-3)

The apostle Peter also declared the necessity of conversion in Acts 3:12-21 we read of his response to the reaction of the people upon the healing of a lame man:

He (Peter) responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. ¹⁴But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. ¹⁶And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

¹⁷“Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Last Lord’s Day we gave consideration to this act of conversion. It was the next work of God’s grace in the order that He brings His people to experience His salvation--the *ordo salutis*, or, order of salvation. In order to refresh in our thinking this matter, here again is the *ordo salutis* as set forth in God’s Word:

- 1) election/predestination (in Christ) (God chooses from eternity whom He purposes to save from sin)
- 2) atonement (when Jesus Christ was crucified to pay for the sins of His people)

- 3) gospel (general) call (this is to any and all sinners to repent of sin and believe on Jesus Christ)
- 4) regeneration (God's impartation of spiritual life in the sinner)¹
- 5) inward (effectual) call (this is the summons of God to His elect to come to Jesus Christ)
- 6) conversion (faith & repentance)
- 7) justification (The declaration of God that the believing sinner is pardoned of his sin and is regarded to be righteous before God. This state of justification, which is through faith alone in Jesus Christ, will deliver the true believer from condemnation on the Day of Judgment.)
- 8) sanctification (the gradual, progressive work of God's grace whereby the believer becomes more holy like Christ.)
- 9) glorification. (When the Christian passes from this life and is finally and fully delivered from the presence of sin).

Conversion is the entire action of turning from sin, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, submitting to Him "in all things." Conversion is something that we are to do, but what we only can do through the grace of God working upon and in us. We take action. We believe on Him. We turn from our sin and yield to Him as our Lord and Savior. We are to give our full effort in this matter. This is not a half-hearted matter. Conversion is surrendering one's whole self, our whole life, unto the Lord.

Peter declared that conversion was necessary in order for one's sins to be pardoned by God. Peter declared, "***Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.***" Conversion is essential to having one's sins forgiven by God.

I. The need and importance of the doctrine of Justification

Now when we speak of the forgiveness of sins, we are brought to the biblical teaching of **justification**. If you look at the *ordo salutis* above, you see that it is listed as the 7th work of God's grace in bringing salvation to His people. This matter of justification is one which all true Christians must be familiar. It is a doctrine of Holy Scripture that is essential and foundational to the gospel, the good news of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ.

Paul set forth justification in the order of salvation recorded in Romans 8. Beginning with verse 28 we read these words:

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, ***these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.***

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? ***It is God who justifies.*** ³⁴Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." ³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:28-39)

¹ For some inexplicable reason, in a previous list in my notes on

There we see the matter of being “justified” being identified as what God accomplishes or bestows upon His people. He first effectually calls His people, and then He justifies them. This is a very important matter; even a critical issue that we must have right if we are to be regarded as true Christians, as God defines them and describes them in His holy Word.

It is fitting that we address this matter today, for this is **Reformation Weekend**. It was 498 years ago this weekend (October 31, 1517) that the Protestant Reformation had its beginning. On that day **Martin Luther** posted his **95 Theses** on the door to the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany, which served as the public bulletin board of the day.

Actually the **95 Theses** did not address directly the doctrine of justification. Luther was posting a theological challenge, hoping to correct the corrupt sale of indulgences by Rome. In order to raise money to build Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the Roman Catholic Church was selling the forgiveness of sins. For a set price, it was claimed that you could shorten the term in purgatory of loved ones. If you purchased an indulgence of sufficient price, you could obtain the full release from purgatory of yourself or loved one. His public posting was the issues that he had included in a letter that he had written to the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. It had the official title, “Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.” Luther’s intention was not to challenge directly the established church. His was a scholarly objection to the practice of the church. But in his 95 theses, as it came to be known, he did get rather direct in his charges. For example, Thesis 82 read, “Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.” Thesis 86 read, “Why does the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?”

But although the posting of the 95 theses is commonly acknowledged to be the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, it was Martin Luther’s recovery and publication of the doctrine of justification through faith alone that became the primary issue that resulted in the separation from Roman Catholicism and the founding of Protestant churches across Europe. “For Martin Luther the doctrine of justification was “the main doctrine of Christianity”, the scriptural teaching that opened the gate of heaven to his anguished soul.”²

A generation later Rome called for a Council to counter the Protestants, which came to be known as the **Council of Trent**. Here are the words of **R. C. Sproul** who described the issue at hand.

“In the final analysis, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed at Trent and continues to affirm now that the basis by which God will declare a person just or unjust is found in one’s ‘inherent righteousness.’ If righteousness does not inhere in the person, that person at worst goes to hell and at best (if any impurities remain in his life) goes to purgatory for a time that may extend to millions of years. In bold contrast to that, the biblical and Protestant view of justification is that the sole grounds of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, which righteousness is imputed to the believer, so that the moment a person has authentic faith in Christ, all that is necessary for salvation becomes theirs by virtue of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The fundamental issue is this: is the basis by which I am justified a righteousness that is my own? Or is it a righteousness that is, as Luther said, ‘an alien righteousness,’ a righteousness that is *extra nos*, apart from us—the righteousness of another, namely, the righteousness of Christ? From the sixteenth century to the present, Rome has always taught that justification is based upon faith, on Christ, and on grace. The difference, however, is that Rome continues to deny that justification is based on Christ alone, received by faith alone, and given by grace alone. The difference between these two positions is the difference between salvation

² Words of Edmund Clowney in D. A. Carson, *Right with God; Justification in the Bible and the World* (The Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 17.

and it's opposite. There is no greater issue facing a person who is alienated from a righteous God.”

This is a doctrine that probably most believers could describe, but I suspect few of us could discuss it in much detail. This doctrine of *justification by faith alone* is an essential and foundational element of the Gospel itself. It is not the entire Gospel, but it is certainly central to the Gospel. What I mean by this is that *the Gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ*. The doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ includes the teaching of justification by faith alone. If you don't have this right, you hold to another Gospel, a Gospel that does not save.

D. A. Carson wrote in an introduction to a book that he edited which was entitled, *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*. In it he wrote of the importance to being right with God. Here are His words:

It is possible to approach the question of justification from many angles. But much can be said for an approach that begins with the widest possible angle, the most fundamental question: How shall anyone be right with God?

Of course, to put the question that way already presupposes that God is of such a nature, and we are of such a nature, that we are *not* naturally right with God. It also presupposes that it is desirable and possible to be right with this God.

Biblical Christianity leaves no doubt on either point. The God 'who is there' (as Francis Schaeffer used to say) is both personal and transcendent, and utterly holy. He is the Creator and the Sovereign; the basis of our responsibility lies in creation (He made us for Himself), and the wretchedness of our defection must be gauged by His greatness, holiness and love. But if we were made for Him, we shall be restless until we find rest in Him, as Augustine rightly observed. If instead we pursue self-interest and cater to self-will, the heart of all sin, we shall find that this is God's universe still, and that we must give an account to Him. On the last day, we shall confess Him with joy at being forgiven, or with terror at being condemned. But confess Him we shall.

Both for His glory and for our good, the most important thing we can pursue is being rightly related to God. The Bible insists that He alone lays down the ground-rules for such a relationship; it also insists that, because He is a God of grace and mercy, He provides the means of access to His presence that we could not gain ourselves.

That, in short, is what the Bible is all about: God pursuing sinful human beings to bring them into a right relationship with Himself, both for their good and for His own glory.³

Here is a concise statement of the doctrine of justification:

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” (This statement is taken from *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*.)

J. I Packer also described this doctrine in his very helpful book entitled, *Concise Theology*, which is really a layman's systematic theology; it is a theology for general readers. It is called *Concise Theology* because Packer sought to set forth the major aspects of the various doctrines of the Bible that he addresses. Here are his words on justification:

The doctrine of justification, the storm center of the Reformation, was a major concern of the apostle Paul. For him it was the heart of the gospel (Rom. 1:17; 3:21-5:21; Gal. 2:15-5:1) shaping both his message (Acts 13:38-39) and his devotion and spiritual life (2 Cor. 5:13-21; Phil. 3:4-14).

³ D. A. Carson, ed, *Right with God; Justification in the Bible and the World* (The Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 13.

Though other New Testament writers affirm the doctrine in substance, the terms in which Protestants have affirmed and defended it for almost five centuries are drawn primarily from Paul.

Justification is a judicial act of God pardoning sinners (wicked and ungodly persons, Rom. 4:5; 3:9-24), accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with himself. This justifying sentence is God's gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:15-17), his bestowal of a status of acceptance for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. 5:21).

God's justifying judgment seems strange, for pronouncing sinners righteous may appear to be precisely the unjust action on the judge's part that God's own law forbade (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). Yet it is in fact a just judgment, for its basis is the righteousness of Jesus Christ who as "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), our representative head acting on our behalf, obeyed the law that bound us and endured the retribution for lawlessness that was our due and so (to use a medieval technical term) "merited" our justification. So we are justified justly, on the basis of justice done (Rom. 3:25-26) and Christ's righteousness reckoned to our account (Rom. 5:18-19).

God's justifying decision is the judgment of the Last Day, declaring where we shall spend eternity, brought forward into the present and pronounced here and now. It is the last judgment that will ever be passed on our destiny; God will never go back on it, however much Satan may appeal against God's verdict (Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10; Rom. 8:33-34). To be justified is to be eternally secure (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:30).⁴

J. I. Packer also wrote an introductory essay to a classic work on Justification, when it was republished by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1961. It was the book entitled, *The Doctrine of Justification*, by **James Buchanon**, which was first published in 1867. Here are a few of his words from this introduction. First he speaks to the role of this doctrine in the early days of the Reformation:

Justification by faith has traditionally, and rightly, been regarded as one of the two basic and controlling principles of Reformation theology. The authority of Scripture was the *formal* principle of that theology, determining the method and providing its touchstone of truth; justification by faith was its *material* principle, determining its substance. In fact, these two principles belong inseparately together, for no theology that seeks simply to follow the Bible can help concerning itself with what is demonstrably the essence of the biblical message. The fullest statement of the gospel that the Bible contains is found in the epistle to the Romans, and Romans minus justification by faith would be like *Hamlet* without the prince.⁵

Packer then said a word about the ongoing importance of this doctrine in the life of the church:

A further fact to weigh is that justification by faith has been the central theme of the preaching in every movement of revival and religious awakening within Protestantism from the Reformation to the present day. The essential thing that happens in every true revival is that the Holy Spirit teaches the church afresh the reality of justification by faith, both as a truth and as a living experience. This could be demonstrated historically from the history of revivals that we have; and it would be theologically correct to define revival simply as God the Spirit doing this work in a situation where previously the church had lapsed, if not from the formal profession of justification by faith, at least from any living apprehension of it.⁶

The Bible's teaching of justification really begins with an awareness of the guilt and condemnation of sinners and their inability to bring remedy to their own condition. God's Word sets forth all people as hopelessly wicked, guilty, and condemned. We read in Romans 3:

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Inter-varsity Press, 1993), pp. 164f.

⁵ James Buchanon, *The Doctrine of Justification* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, orig. 1867), p. vii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

¹⁰As it is written:

“There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹There is none who understands;

There is none who seeks after God.

¹²They have all turned aside;

They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one.”

¹³“Their throat is an open tomb;

With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;

“The poison of asps is under their lips”;

¹⁴“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

¹⁵“Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶Destruction and misery are in their ways

¹⁷And the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Sin is a transgression, a breaking of God’s holy law. God’s law is a reflection of His holy character. He governs His world and His creatures according to His Law. And so, the great need of the sinner is to not be found guilty before God, but rather justified of all charges of God’s law that stands against him. He has need of His guilt to be removed. He has a need for a righteousness that he does not possess.

We need to recognize, therefore, that Jesus Christ alone is the only truly just man who ever lived. He is God, but He is also a man, who came into the world and lived as God demands that we all live, but that He alone could live, for He was without sin. In contrast to every one of us, the Lord Jesus Christ was the only human being that has ever lived who walked wholly in obedience to God’s Law. He never sinned. He never committed one violation of God’s Law. He fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law without exception and without failure. He alone is righteous. Thus, He alone has the right to eternal life. Whereas we are guilty and deserving of the wages of death, He was blameless, so death could not hold him. He alone merited everlasting life. He is truly the only just human being that has ever lived. And because of this and because He is God incarnate, His life and death have infinite value and can bring infinite benefit to them that are united with Him.

When God unites a sinner to Christ through faith, when that sinner believes on Christ alone for His justification, God grants free pardon of all of his sins. This is possible for God to do because of what Christ accomplished through His *passive obedience* on the sinner’s behalf, when He died on the cross. Christ is regarded by the Father to have died on the cross in the place of the believing sinner. His sins are forgiven him. His debt had been paid. And thereafter, God accepts the believing sinner as righteous before Him. Now, this was accomplished through the *active obedience* of Christ. Christ kept the Law perfectly and that righteous life is credited to the believing sinner as though he himself had lived that holy life. **Thus God regards the believing sinner as though he were righteous.** God regards him and thereafter treats him as if he were as sinless and holy and righteous as His own Son, Jesus Christ, for the

Father views the believing sinner to be united with His Son. Thus in and through Christ, the believing sinner has a righteousness that entitles him to everlasting life. Only those united to Christ in justification have this blessing, have this privilege.

II. The nature of justification

1. Justification is an *act of God, not a process.* It is a single, one time forever, act of God in which He declares the guilty sinner to be pardoned of sin and regarded as righteous by God. Justification does not involve God making you to become righteous over time (that is God's work of sanctification in your life). No, justification has to do with a single, one-time act of God in which He declares you to be fully pardoned and regarded as righteous. A person can be a guilty, condemned sinner one moment, the very next moment he can be justified. He comes to his knees a sinner; he gets up a saint. The Lord Jesus declared with respect to the believing tax collector, "*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified*" (Luke 18:14).

2. Justification is a forensic (*legal*) act of God. Justification has to do with a declaration of God regarding the sinner's case. It is as though at the time of believing your case was brought before the judgment bar of God. It was laid out before you and before Him. You saw your guiltiness before Him (conviction). And you saw that He saw you guiltiness. You were without excuse, without hope in and of yourself. You plead that Christ stand in your stead. The Father sees Christ, accepts His life and work in your place. He pronounces you pardoned and righteous. You are cleared of all charges. This occurred at the moment you truly believed on the Lord Jesus. Your case was heard and dealt with once and forever. It was declared that there is no condemnation for the one in Christ.

3. Justification is an objective act of God, not a subjective experience of man. Justification has to do with your actual guilt before God. It is not a matter that deals directly with your feelings of guilt. This is a great error among evangelicals. We have been influenced by secular, worldly psychology so that feelings of guilt are seen as the great evil that needs relief. Feelings of guilt are seen to be the major problem with the human condition. The gospel has been corrupted by many in evangelicalism to be a means of relieving people of their guilt feelings. Justification has to do with your actual guilt before a holy God. The fact is, even people who are filled with feelings of guilt frequently have no conception of their guiltiness before God. They could even become offended if you would suggest the fact. Guilty feelings is an issue of assurance, which is certainly related with justification, but it is not so directly. Justification has to do with your guilt as a condemned sinner before the judgment bar of God, not your feelings of guiltiness.

4. Justification is an act of free grace toward guilty, undeserving sinners. Romans 3:23f read, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" By definition, justification is of God's grace. That simply means that it cannot be earned. It cannot be demanded. It cannot be taken from God. One cannot barter with God for it. God does not give His grace in exchange for your heart, your resolve, your repentance, or your good works. He bestows it freely on whom He chooses.

If you think that you deserve God's forgiveness because you have confessed your sins, cleaned up your life in a measure, made confession, heard mass, eaten of some bread or drink from a cup, been baptized, attend church, read your Bible, live a moral life, then you are either still in your sins or you have fallen into grievous error. In Matthew 9:13 we read that Jesus said, "*I am not come to call **the (self) righteous, but sinners to repentance.***" **Jonathan Edwards** stated it in the 18th century,

God, in the act of justification, has no regard to anything in the person justified, as to godliness, or any goodness in him; but that immediately before this act, God beholds him only as an ungodly creature; so that godliness in the person to be justified is not antecedent to his justification as to be the

ground of it... God of His sovereign grace is pleased, in his dealings with the sinner, so to regard one that has no righteousness, that the consequence shall be the same as if he had.

Consider Romans 4:5, “*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the **ungodly**, his faith is counted for righteousness.*” If you are ungodly and own up to it, then you meet the qualification for coming to Christ.

5. Justification is a just act of God. Romans 3:26 reads, “*To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be **just**, and the **justifier** of him which believeth in Jesus.*” God cannot be justly charged with injustice. Because Christ bore the penalty for the sins of His people, the demands of God’s righteous Law and His holy nature have been fully satisfied.

6. Justification is a once-for-all act of God. A justified sinner cannot become unjustified. Now there are many professing Christians who think themselves to be justified who will in life show themselves to have never had justifying faith. There will be those who will one day stand before Christ on the Day of Judgment that will be discovered never to have had a faith that justified. But there never can be nor ever will be a sinner that has been truly justified who will be found to have become unjustified. It is a once-for-all, never to be rescinded, declaration of God. Once Almighty God has stated His verdict of “Forgiven and Righteous”, that verdict will never be reversed.

7. Justification is complete, knowing of no degrees. Justification is the same for every true believer in Jesus Christ. One believer is not more justified than another is. Each is equally justified in God’s sight because each one stands in the perfect, unchangeable, undiminishing righteousness of Jesus Christ.

8. Justification leads to certain glorification. Romans 8:30 reads, “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he **justified**, them he also **glorified**.”

9. Justification results in becoming children of God. God is the Father of all them that believe (Rom. 4:11). Not everyone in the world is a child of God. Not even everyone who claims to be a Christian is a child of God. Only those who have a faith that justifies them before God have a right to be called the children of God. Galatians 3:26, “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*”

10. Justification is received through faith alone in God and Christ. Our good works do not enter into our justification. Romans 3:30, “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by **faith**, and uncircumcision **through faith**.” God justifies the ungodly. This is affirmed in Romans 4:5, “*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the **ungodly**, his faith is counted for righteousness.*” If you think that you are beginning to attend church with the hope of cleaning up your life so as to be right with God, you will die in your sins. You need to come to Christ now. He will receive you as a sinner. He will not receive you as a pretentious former sinner.

III. The nature of the faith that justifies

1. The faith that justifies is a faith that reflects a simple but complete surrender to God and appeal to God based on Christ and His work. Justifying faith is the simple trusting of the sinner God’s provision in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for a righteousness that he is in need of to stand before a holy God. A sinner may be easily justified by a simple, turning from sin toward God, petitioning God the Father to receive him on the basis and merit of Christ’s life and death. “Father, I know that I am not able or fit to be received of You. I am a sinner. But please receive me for Christ’s sake.” That is the kind of faith that justifies.

2. The faith that justifies itself a product of God's grace (His working). Although faith is something we do in order to receive the forgiveness of sins and obtain a righteous standing before God, faith should not be seen as something that we are able to do apart from grace. It is not as though God made a plan of salvation and then God leaves it up to us to accept it or not. It is not as though God does His part and He expects us to do our part. Rather faith itself is a fruit of God's grace in the soul; saving faith occurs due to a work of God in the sinner. Saving faith is not a product of the fallen heart. It is a work of God that is produced in the heart and mind of an individual. God so works in the hearts and minds of His people that He gives them the desire and ability to understand and the desire and ability to believe the gospel. This is the work of the Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the gospel to save sinners unto Himself.

The Holy Spirit first convicts the sinner of his sin and his just condemnation before God due to His sin. He does this by showing the sinner what God's true righteousness is all about. And the Holy Spirit also convinces the sinner of his own certain condemnation in judgment due to his sin. A person under great conviction can very easily come to desperation during this time. He sees his sin as he had never known before. He perceives that others may have reason to hope, but not he. He is lost and undone. But then the Holy Spirit shows the sinner the glories of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ's life and death for his own case. The Holy Spirit gives to him the *desire* and the *ability* to believe the promises of the gospel. This is what is referred to as a "*work of grace*" in the heart. He believes on Christ and becomes justified—forgiven of his sins and treated by God thereafter as righteous—as though he had never sinned, but had always been obedient to God's law. And so, upon faith in God through Jesus Christ, all the privileges of justification come to him. He is adopted into God's family. He is given an inheritance. He is brought out from under the realm of the devil and given citizenship in the Kingdom of God. All the blessings of Christ are His through faith in Christ. Saving faith is a product of God's grace.

3. The faith that justifies will manifest itself in a holy life. The faith that justifies the sinner will also lead to the sanctification of the saint. But make no mistake, your works of righteousness have nothing to do with your justification other than prove to yourself and others that you have it. As the Puritan **Thomas Manton** once wrote:

By the righteousness of faith we are acquitted from sin, and by the righteousness of works we are acquitted of hypocrisy.

In other words, as someone else described it, "the works of obedience add nothing to your justification; they are visible proof of it."⁷

It is at this point that we come to a very great problem area among evangelicals. (By evangelicals we mean those who profess to be Christians who profess to be Bible-believers and who view the Bible as God's Word and who take the Bible seriously and literally.) Evangelicals have been taught pretty well about justification by faith alone. It is rehearsed and presented frequently, as it should be. We do this well. However, take note of this: evangelicals are generally very messed up in their thinking about *the necessity of works in order to inherit salvation*. You see, they know that faith is the only condition for justification, but *they wrongly conclude that there are no other conditions that have bearing on their salvation*. Although this wrong notion has always reared its head through church history, it is at this current time a major error that is held among evangelicals today.

This was apparently not a major problem in the days of **Jonathan Edwards**. I mention him because he was the leading American evangelical pastor in America in the early to mid 1700's. He is generally regarded to one of the most influential and significant Christian leaders that America has ever

⁷ John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Joel Beeke, John Gerstner, John Armstrong, *Justification by Faith Alone*, Soli Deo Gloria Publishing, 1995, p. 164.

produced. Moreover I mention him because he was the one who was used of God to initially stir the colonies in the revival of the early 1700's known as *The Great Awakening*. As many as one third of the colonists became Christian in just a matter of a few years. The entire fabric of society was transformed. Edwards championed the teaching of justification by faith alone as did the Puritans in England and New England and the Protestant Reformers of a century before him. He wrote a significant sermon entitled "*Justification by Faith Alone*." In his sermon he wrote these words:

And there are many other things besides faith, which are directly proposed to us, to be pursued or performed by us, in order to eternal life, which if they are done, or obtained, we shall have eternal life, and if not done, or not obtained, we shall surely perish.⁸

Later in the sermon he wrote,

So are many other things besides faith; and yet nothing in us but faith renders it meet (fitting) that we should have justification assigned to us.⁹

And then later on in the same sermon he wrote,

We frequently find (in the Bible) promises of eternal life and salvation, and sometimes justification itself, made to our own virtue and obedience. Eternal life is promised to obedience, in Romans 2:7...

And,

Obedience and salvation are connected in fact; which nobody denies . . .¹⁰

But the fact remains is this, today, many do deny that obedience is in any way connected with salvation. "As long as you believe, it does not matter what you do" is often the message that is either explicitly stated or it is implicitly implied in a skewed, twisting of this doctrine. Although faith alone justifies, that faith is not a mere affirmation or assertion of who Christ is and what He has done. The faith that saves is a living vital thing that shapes the course and nature of the entire life of a justified person. So much so, that God can say that: "*the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*" (Heb. 10:38). In other words there is no salvation promised to one who does not live, as a Christian is to live.

⁸ Edwards, p. 623.

⁹ Ibid., p. 624.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 642.